

General Information- Covid-19 crisis

This information leaflet is intended to provide a general summary of some key areas that may concern you in the coming days and weeks in relation to the ongoing health crisis. It is not a substitute for specific advice or guidance in relation to your unique circumstances.

Those who are self-employed

- Those who are self-employed but are either self-isolating (either due to official Government advice or because of symptoms of the Coronavirus) or unable to work due to a risk to public health are entitled to claim Universal Credit or ESA. Further details can be found at www.communities-ni.gov.uk/landing-pages/covid-19-and-benefits
- If claiming Universal Credit you can apply online by following the instructions or if you have no internet access then you can telephone the Universal Credit helpline on **08000121331** and make clear you are self employed but are self-isolating or unable to work due to a risk to public health. Once you have completed all the necessary steps you may be entitled to apply for an advance of your first payment.

Those who are currently in receipt of benefits

- All appointments at Jobs and Benefits Offices have been postponed as of 16 March 2020. All those due to sign on will be excused from doing so. You are not required to attend and will continue to be paid as normal. No one will be penalised for failing to attend the office.
- Face to face benefits assessments are also suspended for a period of 3 months from 16 March. Assessments will be carried out via telephone, or considering medical evidence submitted by post.

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Those who are employed

- Emergency legislation via the *Statutory Sick Pay (General) (Coronavirus Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020* has changed the law in order that those who are self-isolating based on Government advice are to be treated as unfit for work and as such entitled to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP). Please note that Agency workers are also deemed to be employees and as such entitled to SSP.
- If anyone finds themselves in employment disputes and is either unfairly dismissed or wishes to claim constructive dismissal, then as it stands the current time-limits for lodging a case remain in place (in the majority of cases 3 months). As of 27 January 2020 anyone wishing to lodge a claim must first notify the Labour Relations Agency and discuss pre-claim conciliation. This process can continue for one-month, with the option of a 14 day extension, without the clock starting in relation to the statutory time-limits. Correspondence has been sent to the President of the Fair Employment and Industrial Tribunal's requesting detailed guidance on this issue.
- Subject to any contractual agreements, such as a right under contract to lay-off workers without pay, workers who are sent home because the employer has decided to close the workplace are entitled to be paid, whether or not they are told to work from home, in line with their employment contract. Workers are entitled to a copy of their contract and if not in possession of this, then you should request a copy urgently.

Those requiring urgent help

- You should reach out to close friends or family without delay or alternatively you can telephone Lifeline on **08088088000** or Samaritans on 116 123 free from any phone. If you are a victim of Domestic of sexual violence then telephone the helpline on **08088021414**

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Those involved in ongoing court proceedings

- The vast majority of 'non-emergency' cases will be adjourned for a period of around 8 weeks, save for any submissions to the contrary. You should communicate with your legal representative for case-specific guidance. No further jury trials will commence until further notice.
- If you require emergency hearings for criminal matters such as bail then you should contact your appointed legal representative. Emergency family proceedings include non-molestation orders, declaratory judgements in patient's cases and child abduction. Emergency civil proceedings include *Habeas Corpus* applications, urgent injunctions and urgent Judicial Reviews. For more detailed guidance visit www.judiciaryni.uk and continue to check for further updates as the situation evolves.

Local Business

- Invest NI's Business Support Team is available on **08001814422** for up to date advice and guidance on support measures available in Northern Ireland.
- Further information is available online from NI Business Info www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk

HMRC

- For those concerned in relation to tax issues, HMRC have a dedicated helpline for businesses and those who are self-employed. The number is **03004563565**. If you are struggling with paying your tax bill or worried about debt collection proceedings, you should telephone the helpline and request support and/or a suspension of any ongoing debt collection proceedings. This helpline can also offer advice on what other assistance is available in relation to your personal circumstances.

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